



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

King Street at Christmas Time

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Image: 300 block King Street, 1960s. Photo, Office of Historic Alexandria.

For decades Christmas traditions along King Street have included festive decorations, parades, and of course, shopping. In 1932, the Retail Merchants Association organized an evening parade that began on Fayette Street, traveled down King Street and circled City Hall, where officials reviewed the procession that featured bands, drum corps, children dressed in Christmas costumes and Santa Claus.

Following the end of World War II, the festivities in 1945 were especially memorable. The decorations, described by the Washington Post as the “most elaborate ever seen in the city,” included “evergreen trees on every lamp post strung with lights and tinsel.” The Alexandria Chamber of Commerce organized the parade and local businesses funded it, sponsoring decorations along the parade route.

In the 1950s, stores along King and Washington streets, like Lerner, G.C. Murphy, and J.C. Penney, were popular with shoppers and attracted business with holiday window displays, music and appearances by Santa. The yuletide season in 1958 kicked off with music and carols from the Alexandria Harmonizers and the Alexandria Citizens Band. The mayor flipped a switch to turn on 12 blocks of holiday lights. A week and a half later, the tree lighting ceremony was held outside Alexandria Hospital, then located on Duke Street.

For many years, Christmas decorations of bells, stars, garland and colorful lights were suspended across King Street for several blocks, like these seen in the 300 block in the 1960s, before urban renewal. In 1968, with the completion of the newly designed Market Square, the tree lighting ceremony was held in front of City Hall, a tradition that continues today.



“Out of the Attic” is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as “Marking Time” and explored Alexandria’s history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into “Out of the Attic” and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.



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These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by Amy Bertsch, former Public Information Officer, and Lance Mallamo, Director, on behalf of the Office of Historic Alexandria.